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**The Butterfly Effect:  
How a Random Act of Kindness Changed My Life**

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When I was in the 6th grade, my science teacher taught the butterfly effect. In short, the theory states that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wings can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world. The idea that something so small could create such large ripples in life really resonated with me. I often wondered how my actions changed life around me.

Fast-forward eight years to Friday, Nov. 13, 2015. I am a 20-year-old college student studying abroad in Florence, Italy. I find myself stranded in Zurich, Switzerland alone with no cash, cell phone, coat, or knowledge of the Swiss German language. As I wander the chilly streets of Zurich that my mind floats, once again, to my 6th grade classroom. I reflect on the series of events that led me and my short-sleeve T-shirt to this Swiss street as I enter a Starbucks and get in line.

The day began at 6 a.m. when I awoke, walked to the Florence train station, took a shuttle from the station to the Florence airport, and sat at my gate for three hours as the first leg of my flight (Florence to Zurich) was delayed further and further into the morning due to an issue onboard. Part two of my flight (Zurich to Marrakech, Morocco) was guaranteed, the flight crew assured me, and I waited unconvinced to board my plane.

Despite the airline's assurances that all connections would be made, my flight to Marrakech left the ground 5 minutes before my first flight deplaned in Switzerland. I made my way to the customer service desk and joined the long queue of displaced passengers. The woman at the desk unsympathetically informed me that the next flight to Morocco was not until the next day. She told me the airline would provide a hotel room in Zurich until the morning. Frustrated, I asked her to double-check every flight into Marrakech, explaining that I was only in Morocco for the weekend and that this delay would give me no more than 24 hours in Africa. There was nothing she could do, she said, and she handed me a hotel voucher. Hopelessly, I made my way out of the airport.

Determined to make the best of the situation, I committed my afternoon to exploring the city. After taking a very expensive Uber into downtown Zurich, I decided my first priority was to get some cash. As all travelers know, Europe is notorious for being cash-only. As I had been living in Florence, my cash was in Euros, not Swiss Francs. I located an ATM and attempted to take out 20 Franc, only to find that the minimum was 50, a sum very close to 50 USD. I couldn't spend \$50 in a few hours, not when the hotel served complimentary dinner, and with no plans to return to Switzerland I couldn't justify taking cash out of the machine. Noticing a Starbucks across the street, I made my way over and prepared to pay with my credit card. Now, as I wait in line, I make a mental note of the beauty of Starbucks: it is universally delicious and it universally takes Visa.

As my turn to order draws closer I think of the butterfly's wings. How strange that something as small as an onboard flight malfunction could have deferred my weekend so entirely. Unprepared for Swiss weather and dressed for the warm African climate, I order a hot drink and pay with my card before sitting at a table to recuperate. I can't use my American cell phone to call anyone, I am cold, and I have no cash- leaving me for all intensive purposes penniless. I feel defeated. As I drink my warm coffee I decide I will somehow make my traditional postcard purchase and return to the hotel to sleep before my morning flight.

I approach a group of four German-speaking girls who look about my age and tentatively ask if they speak English. After confirming they can understand me, I briefly explain my situation and propose that I buy one of them a drink with my Visa (which costs a ridiculous \$7) in exchange for 2 or 3 Franc to buy a postcard. The girl closest to me replies that they don't want another drink: they each already have one. Upset and flustered, I turn away and decide just to flag down a taxi that takes card and to return to the hotel. One of the other girls stops me and asks me to explain again. I describe how I buy a postcard in each city I visit and how I hadn't wanted to leave Zurich without one. I offer again to buy her something and she shakes her head, handing me 5 Franc. "If this is really all you need," she says, "Keep it. I don't need a drink, you can just have this." I thank her for her kindness and leave to buy a postcard.

Twenty minutes later, postcard in hand, I stand at a taxi stand near the Starbucks and wait for a ride when I see the kind girl come outside. I walk over and begin to dig in my purse for the 3 Franc change from my purchase, calling to the girl to wait so I can give her the rest of her money back. She smiles and declines the money.

"One day," she says, "I will need help from a stranger and someone will be kind to me. I am happy to be this person for you." She hugs me and walks away. Incredibly grateful and moved, I take a taxi back to the hotel and think again about the butterfly effect. How the small catalyst of a delayed flight had rippled into such a chaotic day led me to meet this young girl. I realize, humbled, that the experience in Zurich has changed my life and my worldview forever. Because of this girl's kindness, I will in turn be kind to a stranger. This stranger will then pass it on to another and the circle will continue. Kindness will ripple outward and affect an infinite number of people. Weeks after my (short) weekend in Africa, I remember how I got there and now strive to bring compassion wherever I go.

My hope in writing this article is to spread the idea that one small act of kindness can do infinite good. That any act, no matter how small, can change peoples' lives. I hope that in reading of this girl's kindness, you will be moved to help out a stranger. I hope that my story can act as a flutter and will ripple into and change the lives of others in a positive way. While one small act may not change the entire world, it could change someone's world entirely.